INSTITUTE *of* **Museum** and **Library** SERVICES

Conservation Project
Support Grants

FY2012 CPS
Tier 1 Reviewer Handbook

**Welcome to
The CPS
Program Review
Process**

Thank you for offering to serve as a Conservation Project Support (CPS) Tier 1 reviewer. We have selected you to review this year's applications because of your professional expertise in museum conservation and collections care issues. We have prepared this handbook specifically for Tier 1 reviewers to ensure the fair and candid review of all eligible applications and to provide you with the procedural and technical information you need. Please use it in tandem with the FY2012 Conservation Project Support Guidelines available at:

http://www.imls.gov/applicants/cps_guidelines_2012.aspx.

Even if you have reviewed for other IMLS programs, including CPS, in the past, you should read through this booklet since we have made some significant changes to CPS this year.

Conservation Project Support (CPS) is an annual, federal grant program that awards applicants up to $150,000 to help museums identify conservation needs and priorities and perform activities to ensure the safekeeping of their living and non-living collections.

IMLS has awarded 3,383 CPS grants since the program's inception in 1984. All types and sizes of museums have benefited from this program. We view the CPS program as a partnership between IMLS and each grant recipient, working toward the mutual goal of protecting significant aspects of our artistic, cultural, and scientific heritage.

Purpose and Scope of the Conservation Project Support Program

The purpose of the Conservation Project Support (CPS) program is to help safeguard the collections housed in the nation's museums so that current and future generations can gain access to and learn from the rich artistic, cultural, and scientific heritage they represent. To achieve this purpose, we award grants to help museums identify their conservation needs and priorities and to help them ensure the safekeeping of their collections by implementing sound conservation practices.

We support a holistic approach to conservation and have designed the program to assist museums in developing logical, institution-wide approaches to caring for their nonliving and living collections. The full range of conservation opportunities we support through this program can provide a roadmap to guide each institution's collections care through which it contributes public value to its community.

It is especially important to remember that applicants must apply for projects that are among their institution's highest collections care needs. Types of projects eligible for funding include:

- Surveys, including General Conservation Surveys, Detailed Conservation Surveys, and Environmental Surveys
- Environmental improvements for collections
- Treatment of collections
- Training of staff, volunteers, and students in conservation

CPS awards may be used for all types of collections, including:

- Art
- History
- Natural History
- Anthropology
- Living Plants
- Living Animals

Use of Funds

Eligible Activities

Allowable expenses for CPS grants may include:
- project personnel (contract or in-house), whose time is necessary for the proper and efficient execution of the project;
- project consultants and their travel;
- staff and volunteer training in collections care;
- internships/fellowships in conservation;
- repair and stabilization activities that are directly related to the conservation project;
- micro-environments for an object, specimen, or room (e.g. storage);
- basic environmental monitoring equipment and conservation supplies if these items will be used in conjunction with the project;
- heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment to improve collections storage and exhibit environments;
- educational materials, staff time, or other supplies for sharing the impact of the conservation activities;
- for living plant collections: mapping software for survey projects;
- for living collections only: those physical improvements that relate directly to the perpetuation of the specimens or species involved in the project;
- staff time spent traveling to conservation facilities or consulting with conservation professionals;
- evaluation to show the extent to which the project has met its goals;
- indirect or overhead costs

All proposed expenses must be justified in the application budget.

Ineligible Activities

Unallowable expenses for CPS grants may include:
- digitization of collections (see Museums for America grants);
- general museum fundraising costs, such as development office expenditures or other staff time devoted to general fundraising;
- general advertising or public relations costs designed solely for promotional activities other than those related to the specific project;
- contributions to endowments;
- acquisition of collections;
- social activities, ceremonies, receptions, or entertainment;
- construction and renovation of museum facilities;
- exhibit fabrication that includes creation of large-scale permanent structures for animals or objects that would involve contract labor of the construction trades;
- inventorying or cataloguing collections;
- upgrade or installation of a security or fire suppression system;

- installation or purchase of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) equipment for an entire museum building;
- reconstruction or renovation of historic sites and landscapes;
- replacement of architectural details for historical accuracy; and
- pre-award costs.

Application and Review Process

1. Applicants submit their applications using Grants.gov—the single point of entry for IMLS grant applications.

2. IMLS receives the applications and checks them for organizational eligibility and application completeness.

3. IMLS identifies a pool of available Tier 1 reviewers with appropriate expertise and assigns three reviewers to evaluate each application.

4. Tier 1 reviewers receive access to the applications, evaluate them, and complete their reviews online.

5. IMLS uses Tier 1 reviewers' comments and scores to rank the applications. This ranking is used to determine which applications are sent for Tier 2 panel review.

6. CPS Tier 2 review panels meet in Washington, DC, after the Tier 1 review period to provide a second level of review and make final funding recommendations. Tier 2 panels are composed of conservators, collections managers, museum directors, and other professionals who have experience in collections care issues. Tier 2 panelists are not asked to do detailed technical reviews. Rather, they and IMLS staff are relying on Tier 1 reviewers to point out specific technical strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. Tier 2 panelists review applications from a broad perspective, identifying applications that best meet IMLS program goals. They also provide insight into issues pertinent to this year's competition as well as provide recommendations on improving the grant program, its application, and its process.

7. IMLS staff members review the financial/accounting information and the budget sheets of each potential grantee.

8. IMLS staff members provide a list of applications recommended for funding to the IMLS Director for approval.

9. IMLS awards Conservation Project Support grants in late April. IMLS notifies all applicants whether or not they have received an award. With their notification, all applicants receive anonymous copies of the Tier 1 and Tier 2 reviews. IMLS also sends notification of the awards to each participating reviewer.

How Your Reviews Are Used

Your Tier 1 scores determine the ranking of applications and are the basis upon which IMLS decides which go to Tier 2 panel review for further consideration and which do not.

For those applications that go to Tier 2 panel review, your reviews focus attention on the strengths and weaknesses of each application. If a Tier 2 panel-reviewed application is not funded, your comments may be used to assist the applicant in revising the application for future submission.

Applicants whose proposals are not ranked highly enough for Tier 2 panel review receive only your Tier 1 review comments.

Successful applicants point to good scores and positive comments as a stamp of approval for their project proposals. Museum administrators report that receiving IMLS awards enhances fundraising success with private foundations as well as state and local sources. Unsuccessful applicants often use reviewer comments to improve or revise their applications for resubmission.

Follow Up

After we announce awards for the CPS program in April, we invite you to call the IMLS Office of Museum Services to schedule an appointment to discuss your reviews and provide feedback to us about your experience as a Tier 1 reviewer.

We greatly appreciate the tremendous amount of time and effort you commit to being a reviewer. By participating in the peer review process, you make a significant contribution to the Conservation Project Support grant program and provide an invaluable service to the entire museum community. Thank you!

Application Review Instructions

First Steps

This section of the handbook contains detailed information on how to review a Conservation Project Support program application. If you encounter any problems while undertaking your Tier 1 reviews, please contact one of us:

> Connie Bodner: 202/653-4636 or cbodner@imls.gov
> Mark Feitl: 202/653-4635 or mfeitl@imls.gov

Verify Access to Applications Online

You will need to use **two** online systems—one to download applications and another to upload and submit your review comments and scores. Detailed instructions for downloading applications are included as **Appendix I** of this handbook for easy reference.

Conflict of Interest

Read through your list of applications to see if there are any potential conflicts of interest. Please see the Reviewer Conflict of Interest Statement included as **Appendix II** of this handbook. A conflict of interest would arise if you have a financial interest in whether or not the proposal is funded, or if for some reason, you feel that you cannot review it objectively. Contact Connie Bodner (cbodner@imls.gov or 202/653-4636) immediately if you have a conflict, or what may appear to be a conflict.

Confidentiality

The information contained in grant applications is strictly confidential. Do not discuss or reveal names, institutions' project activities, or any other information contained in the applications. Contact us if you have any questions concerning an application. Do not contact an applicant directly.

Read Applications

Read your applications to develop a feel for the range of responses. In advance of doing so, reread the CPS guidelines at http://www.imls.gov/applicants/cps_guidelines_2012.aspx. On the next page is a quick reference sheet that you may wish to print and place in your workspace where you can easily refer to it throughout the review process. It lists the types of information you should look for in each applicant's responses and should serve as guideposts for your review.

Conservation Project Support
FY2012 Tier 1 Review Criteria Quick Reference

1. STATEMENT OF NEED

- Evidence that the project will address one or more needs identified as among the institution's highest conservation priorities documented in a professionally executed conservation assessment report, long-range conservation plan, or equivalent document
- Evidence that the museum is practicing responsible collections care and, if applicable, that previous IMLS grants have enhanced collections care at the institution
- Evidence that the museum's leadership has committed resources (e.g. financial, staff, materials, supplies, equipment) to improving overall collections care

2. IMPACT

- Evidence that the collections will be better served by the successful completion of this project
- Evidence that project activities will have a beneficial impact on the institution, its staff, and its audience(s), including but not limited to increased staff capacities leading to improved practice
- Evidence that the project activities and results will be shared with the museum's community
- Evidence of appropriate methods to assess the project activities

3. PROJECT DESIGN

- Evidence that the project will meet IMLS conservation program goals
- Evidence that the project will employ efficient, effective, and reasonable approaches to accomplish clear goals and objectives
- Evidence that the methodology and design are appropriate to the scope of the project
- Evidence of appropriate method(s) to assess project activities and progress

4. PROJECT RESOURCES: PERSONNEL, TIME, BUDGET

- Evidence that the applicant will complete the project activities in the time allocated through the effective deployment and management of resources, including money, facilities, equipment, and supplies
- Evidence of sound financial management coupled with an appropriate and cost-efficient budget
- Evidence that the applicant has the ability to meet the cost share requirement
- Evidence that the project personnel demonstrate appropriate experience and expertise and will commit adequate time to accomplish project activities

Evaluate Applications

Read your applications again and take notes as you read. Draft comments for each of the four narrative responses. We strongly recommend that you draft your comments using Microsoft Word, and then cut and paste them into the Online Reviewer System form.

- Use your professional knowledge and experience to assess the information objectively.
- Judge the application on its own merits. DO NOT base your evaluation on any prior knowledge of an institution.
- If you question the accuracy of any information, call IMLS to discuss it. DO NOT question the applicant's honesty or integrity in your written comments.
- DO NOT contact the museum.
- Consider whether the applicant has the resources to successfully complete the project.
- Consider a project's strengths *and* weaknesses. Acknowledge and compliment strengths, and offer practical suggestions for improving weaknesses.
- Analyze the narrative section of the application in your comments. Summarizing or paraphrasing the applicant's own words will not help the applicant.
- Make your comments specific to the individual applicant. Vague, general statements are not helpful.
- Make your comments easy to read and understand.

Remember that IMLS staff members use your comments to help applicants improve their future applications.

Qualities of a Good Proposal

Every good CPS proposal should:
- Address one of the institution's highest conservation priorities
- Assist the museum in implementing a logical, institution-wide approach to caring for its collections
- Show that the project is well planned and the museum has the appropriate resources to complete the project

| **Assign Scores** | Assign a preliminary score to each narrative section. Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 = lowest and 5 = highest. |

- Use only whole numbers.
- Do not use fractions, decimals, zeroes, or more than one number.

SCORE DEFINITIONS
5 – Excellent: The applicant's response is outstanding and provides exceptional support for the proposed project.
4 – Very Good: The applicant's response provides solid support for the proposed project.
3 – Good: The applicant's response is adequate but could be strengthened in its support for the proposed project.
2 – Some Merit: The applicant's response is flawed and does not adequately support the proposed project.
1 – Inadequate/Insufficient: The applicant's response is inadequate or provides insufficient information to allow for a confident evaluation.

IMPORTANT: To help applicants understand and benefit from your reviews, make sure that your scores accurately reflect your written comments.

Type Size and Format

The application does not provide a form for the narrative part of the application. Applicants may divide the space for narrative responses as they wish, as long as they address all questions in number order as indicated in the application guidelines and the narrative response does not exceed seven pages.

If you see a problem …

- Call Connie Bodner at 202/653-4636.
- Review the application, and DO NOT lower an applicant's score because of reduced type or reformatting.
- DO NOT note the problem on your review sheet itself, but rather as a separate note for IMLS only.

We will assign penalties as necessary.

Review Your Work

Review your draft comments and preliminary scores. When you are finished, proofread your reviews. Adjust your scores, if necessary, to more accurately reflect your written evaluation. Scores should support comments, and comments should justify scores.

For each application, you must complete an online review that includes:
- written comments about each of the four narrative sections;
- a corresponding score from 1-5 for each of the four narrative sections; and
- additional comments, if desired. (This section is optional and is not scored.)

Creating Constructive and Effective Comments

As you formulate your comments, keep in mind the following characteristics of good and helpful remarks:

- They are presented in a constructive manner.
- They are concise, specific, and easy to read and understand.
- They acknowledge the resources of the institution.
- They are specific to the individual applicant.
- They correlate with the score given.
- They reflect the application's strengths and identify areas for improvement.
- They are directed to applicants for their use.

Remember, both successful and unsuccessful applicants use your comments to improve their institutions and future applications. Each of the following examples is annotated with an explanation of why it is a good comment.

2. Project Design:
"The project designed is a systematic approach to complete a base map for the lower garden areas, complete the Plant Record Database, and map and label the specimens in the garden. The tools they propose to use include AutoCAD, Access, and label machine and Vision software. These will help the applicant to achieve their intended goals. However, Activity I is unclear. The land survey includes infrastructure, trees, boundaries, and markers. This map, with a 2 ft contour, can be easily converted into AutoCAD format and is ready to merge with maps of other areas of the garden. The description presented here is not detailed enough to understand why it takes 80 hours to format the data." (**Specific, clear, concise, and helpful**)

"A key component to the success of this work lies in the use of positive reinforcement training to gain the cooperation of the subject animals. This renders the collection of cytological samples and even ultrasound records minimally invasive and virtually stress free for the bears. Thus, much higher sampling rates will be possible, increasing the reliability of the results. The video monitoring will provide easily collected, standardized behavioral data. Scoring video data is difficult at best, but having all of the scoring performed by a single individual or small group trained by a single person should greatly increase the reliability of the video records. All of this increases the probability of the production of

highly reliable new data that will be of tremendous benefit in the management of this seriously declining population." (**Detailed, specific to application**)

Avoiding Poor Comments	Vague, derogatory, or extraneous remarks are not helpful to Tier 2 panelists or to applicants. These comments actually hinder the evaluation process rather than help it.

To avoid making poor comments, DO NOT:

- Make derogatory remarks. (Offer suggestions for improvement rather than harsh criticism.)

- Penalize an applicant because you feel the institution does not need the money. (Any eligible institution may receive funds, regardless of need.)
- Penalize an applicant because of missing materials. (If you believe an application is missing required materials, please contact a CPS staff member immediately.)
- Question an applicant's honesty or integrity. (You may question the accuracy of information provided by the applicant, but if you are unsure how to frame your question, contact IMLS.)
- Offer or ask for irrelevant or extraneous information. (Your comments should concern only the information IMLS requests of applicants.)

Each of the following examples is annotated with an explanation of why it is a poor comment.

1. Statement of Need:
"This project fits into the overall 'big picture' for the art museum and the university as a whole." (**Vague, not evaluative**)

2. Project Design:
"Efficient breakdown of categories for the individual parts of the project." (**Vague, irrelevant, not evaluative**)

"Conservation methods and the time table are presented in exceptional detail and almost to the point of overkill." (**Vague, not evaluative, insensitive**)

3. Project Resources: Time, Personnel, Budget:
"I might question some parts of the budget, but they probably know what they are doing." (**Vague, not evaluative, and irrelevant**)

"The project budget is reasonable for this kind of project." (**Vague, not evaluative**)

"The personnel are clearly experienced and qualified." (**Vague, not evaluative**)

4. Impact:
"The benefits stated are better can and monitoring of the collection, which is adequate." (**Vague, insensitive, difficult to understand**)

5. Overview (optional)
"This is worthy of funding; however, I would ask the project contact person for some additional details if appropriate." (**Vague, wrong audience**)

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **How should I assign scores?**
   Assign scores for each of the four narrative questions, using a scale of 1–5 discussed under "Score Definitions").

2. **Should I consider new projects more competitive than resubmissions?**
   No. All projects, whether new or resubmissions, should be considered on the basis of the current proposal. An institution's application history should not be a factor in your evaluation.

3. **What should I do if I discover something missing in the application or if the applicant did not complete all parts of the application?**
   Call IMLS immediately at 202/653-4636. We may be able to send you the missing materials if they were submitted as part of the original application. DO NOT contact the applicant.

4. **Should I consider need when evaluating an application?**
   No. Need is not a review criterion. The application should be evaluated based on, among other things, whether or not it makes a convincing case that the project is one of their institution's highest conservation priorities as documented in their narrative and supporting documentation.

5. **To whom should the review comments be addressed?**
   Please address all comments to the applicant. While the IMLS Tier 2 panelists read the comments, it is important to write the comments to the applicant so they may use them constructively.

6. **What should I do if I find that I know someone mentioned in the application?**
   Call Connie Bodner (202/653-4636) immediately and discuss the possibility of a conflict of interest. Not all cases are conflicts, but please call us to discuss your situation.

7. **Must I make comments for every question?**

Yes, you must make a constructive and substantive comment for every question. This is the best way to help applicants improve all aspects of their applications.

8. **What are indirect cost rates, and why do some institutions have such a high rate?**

Indirect cost rates are negotiated rates at which institutions may charge overhead expenses when carrying out a project. Some institutions, such as universities, may seem to have high rates because of the infrastructure involved in carrying out a project within that institution. Also, an institution may have a high rate if they are in a very isolated geographic area, making it more expensive to carry on daily activities. Please do not allow these rates to bias your reviews.

9. **Is there any type of project that carries more weight than another?**

No. All types of projects have equal weight. The project, however, must address one of the applicant's highest conservation priorities.

10. **What happens to my reviews once they are submitted?**

We take the average of all three Tier 1 reviewer scores and rank the applications from highest to lowest. We then forward the most highly ranked applications to Tier 2 panel review for further consideration.

Note: Appendices I, II, and III have been removed from this sample handbook.